

# **INFORMATION ON**

**CHIPPEWA INDIANS**

**Turtle Mountain Reservation**

**UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

**BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS**

**TURTLE MOUNTAIN AGENCY  
BELCOURT, NORTH DAKOTA 58316**

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Historical Background

The Chippewas, a leading branch of the Algonquin family, during the three centuries immediately following the discovery of America, occupied an extensive territory extending indefinitely back from the Northern and Eastern shore of Lakes Superior and Huron. They filtered through the Sault Ste. Marie into what are now Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota, and moved westward into the present Dakotas and Montana, pushing the Sioux southward in many fierce conflicts over the rich hunting grounds. For more than two centuries Superior was a Chippewa lake.

As the Chippewas spread to the West and South, they tended to break up into loosely defined groups more or less independent of the wide-flung tribes; and just as in the East they had beaten the Iroquois back to the shores of Lake Erie, their western groups came to grips with the Fox and the Sioux and forced them southward to established treaty boundaries.

For a century or more before the establishment of the International boundary, the Chippewas and their closely related groups had occupied a wide belt on either side of its future location and across it freely mingled the Chippewas and their blood brothers, the Crees, even down to the present.

The Turtle Mountain Chippewas, so called because the nucleus of the band was settled in the Turtle Mountains, or hills, occupied an extensive area with necessarily indefinite boundaries, since the country was not surveyed. It was located in the extreme northeastern part of North Dakota and extended from the Canadian border south to Devils Lake and from the Pembina Mountains on the east, indefinitely westward.

The southern boundary, and to some extent, the western boundary, had been in undisputed possession until about 1880. In addition, their claims lapped far over into Canada. Their disregard for the border led to many complications later.

The Chippewas or Ojibways were also at one time the most numerous tribe north of Mexico. The Indian Handbook says: "Although strong in numbers and occupying an extensive territory, the Chippewas were never prominent in history, owing to their remoteness from the frontier during the period of the colonial wars." Nevertheless, into their country came the great fur companies, the Hudson Bay and the Northwest, and into their territories pushed the French pioneer hunters, trappers and woodsmen.

As hunting, trapping, and lumbering diminished and river and lake navigation changed, while agricultural enterprises came in, the Chippewas were left stranded as they have been for three generations. Although the Government recognized the claims of the Turtle Mountain Chippewas, no reservation was set up for their use for many years and the Indians were left to shift for themselves, obtaining their living mostly from fish and game within the region. Game was scarce after the passing of the buffalo, and the Indians were often reduced to starving conditions.

On March 3, 1873, Congress appropriated \$25,000 for the purchase of a township on the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota as a home for the Turtle Mountain Indians. An additional \$10,000 was provided in the bill to enable the Indians to move to their new location. The Turtle Mountain band refused to accept this proposition of Congress and continued to occupy their former home in the Turtle Mountains since they felt that their claim to the territory was valid and that they must continue occupancy of the lands to protect their interests.

Final settlement of the claims of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians was provided for in a treaty made October 2, 1892, which was amended and approved by Congress April 21, 1904. By the terms of this treaty the Turtle Mountain Band ceded claims to all territory except two townships within the Turtle Mountain area. The treaty further provided for a cash payment of \$1,000,000 to the tribe for the land ceded (9,000,000 acres). Provisions were also made for the allotting of the reservation and the allotting of such other lands within the Public Domain as might be necessary for the members of the tribe unable to secure land within the designated reservation.

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#### Present-day Chippewa Indians

The Turtle Mountain Chippewas reside in North Dakota about the Central part of the state, near the Canadian border. The reservation consists of slightly over two townships of land. In 1930 there were 979 allotments in Montana and 178 allotments outside of Rolette County in North Dakota; however, many allotments had been patented and sold before 1930. Due to the small size of the reservation and the large number of eligible Indians many were unable to acquire allotments on the reservation. To enable these Indians to also secure land the agreement ratified in 1904 allowed individual Indians to select allotments on the public domain. This accounts for the large number of allotments throughout North Dakota and Montana that still belong to Turtle Mountain Chippewas. In 1932, 1133 allotments were transferred to the jurisdiction of the nearest Indian Agency, viz: Fort Peck, Fort Belknap, Rocky Boy, and Northern Cheyenne in Montana. Fort Totten and Fort Berthold in North Dakota and Cheyenne River Agency in South Dakota. There are presently approximately 556 allotments on the public domain, not including public domain tracts in Rolette County. These are for the most part under the administrative supervision of the Montana agencies. Approximately 60% to 75% of these allotments are 160 tracts.

The Turtle Mountain Chippewas are governed by a democratically elected Tribal Council made up of eight members, two being elected from each of the four districts of the reservation as provided by a Tribal Constitution and By-laws approved by the Secretary of the Interior in June of 1959. A Tribal Chairman is elected at large. Elections are held every two years. Regular meetings of the Council are held on the first Wednesday of each month and special meetings at the call of the Chairman.

As a whole, the Turtle Mountain Chippewas are a handsome, agreeable, good looking group of people. They are intelligent, cooperative, and easy to work with. Although they rebelled twice against the Canadian Government, under the leadership of Louis Riel, they have never taken up arms against the Government of the United States, and they acted as the guides, interpreters and scouts for every campaign the United States Army engaged in against other tribes of Indians in the plains area.

With the exception of about 200 full blood individuals, the people of the Reservation are mixed bloods, much of which is of French extraction, with some English, Scotch and Irish ancestry. Their physical features vary from dark straight hair, dark skin and dark eyes, to blond hair and blue eyes. Culturally speaking they are French because they have had 12 to 14 generations of French background. They speak the French language, celebrate the French holidays, and prepare many of the delicacies that the French prefer. They do not have the cultural characteristics of the old Chippewa people that we read about in history. At the present time there are in the neighborhood of 6,000 living on or in the vicinity of the Reservation. There are some 12,000 enrolled; and the 6,000 not living on the Reservation are scattered over the entire United States, for instance: A Chiropractor who practices in Jacksonville, Florida; a Medical Doctor who practices in Wisconsin; a widely known singer who lives in Minnesota; many nurses, school teachers, and professions of all types are represented in the Chippewa group. There are probably hundreds of professional people and skilled laborers who have taken their places in society.

Prior to the advent of so much labor-saving machinery in agriculture, a very large area of the farming country south of the Canadian boundary in North Dakota depended on the seasonal labor these people engaged in for the planting, care and harvesting of grain, potatoes, beets and other crops grown here.

On the Reservation there are only about 70 families totally or partially dependent on farm income. Therefore, we have a large number of families who are unable to make a living from the land. These surplus people have followed seasonal employment, but each year have experienced less demand for laborers. Mechanized equipment has taken the place of laborers, hence unemployment is increasing. Some Chippewa Indians work on the railroads; about 85 work in the Turtle Mountain Jewel Plant, which makes precision jewels for the Army Ordinance and Bulova Watch Company. Approximately 75 are employed on a full or part

time basis at the North Dakota State Tuberculosis Sanitarium, San Haven, North Dakota. Many are employed in the town of Rolla and surrounding areas on a yearly basis. However, those who follow seasonal construction and farm employment return to the Reservation during the winter and some draw unemployment insurance. Those who are not qualified to draw unemployment compensation are financially aided during five or six months of the winter by the Agency Branch of Welfare, through its General Assistance Program.

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### Geographical Environment and Relationships to Surrounding Area

The topography of the Turtle Mountain Reservation consists mainly of low, rolling hills, covered with small trees and brush and interspersed with many lakes of varying sizes. The tree-cover consists of poplar, birch, oak, willow, and aspen. There are numerous kinds of wild fruits, and as many wild berries grow in this area as will be found in any part of the United States. The soil is glacial deposit, which naturally contains a good deal of sand, gravel and rock.

The Turtle Mountain area of which the reservation is but a 12 by 6 mile part, extends west of Bottineau, North Dakota, and north into Canada, is the most picturesque spot in all of North Dakota. During the summer months it is very beautiful; the rainfall in this area is adequate; everything grows well, and with all of the shrubs and bushes leaved out and in bloom it should be one of the potential vacation spots in the Middlewest. It is felt that although the reservation has a good network of well graded, gravelled roads that whenever roads are paved and this area is publicized, North Dakota will get a great deal of tourist traffic. The reservation proper is filled with numerous small lakes; the area is about half water. Most of these small lakes are of no particular value, being too shallow to be good fishing lakes. However, Belcourt Lake, on the reservation is one of the best fishing spots in North Dakota. A large lake, Gordon Lake, has also been restocked and is becoming an excellent place for fishing.

The town of Belcourt, North Dakota has a population of approximately 500<sup>0</sup> Indian people. It has a new postoffice building which was occupied in February 1963. The Postmaster and three other postal employees are Turtle Mountain Chippewas. The main street of Belcourt is comprised of a Red Owl Store, Albert's Bar, Dee Dee's Cafe, Patnaude's Barber Shop, J & A Service Station, Brien's Gas Station, Belcourt Laundromat, American Legion Club, and a new Tastee Freez, all owned and operated by Turtle Mountain Chippewas. Niewoehner's Funeral Home of Rolla, has a funeral chapel in Belcourt, which is cared for by a Turtle Mountain Chippewa. The American Legion building in Belcourt is owned by the Lilley-Dionne Post, which has a membership of 120 Indian members and six or seven non-Indians. The building was bought and has been put into an excellent state of repair through the efforts of the Post. The building is used for public meetings and can be rented by groups and organizations for dances, weddings, or other gatherings. The Post holds bingo games, card parties and dances to raise funds which are used to sponsor many worthwhile activities.

The town of Rolla, located seven miles east of Belcourt, is made up of an unusual group of people who are cooperative with this agency. The business men of this city are civic minded and understand the field of human relationship; there is very little discrimination. The Commercial Club, comprised of business men and the community, raised \$25,000 which enabled them to acquire the Turtle Mountain Jewel Plant mentioned before. Chippewa Indians are working in hotels, restaurants, stores, barbershops, beauty shops, creamery, implement companies, and in most business places in Rolla. Some of the businesses in Rolla are owned and operated by Turtle Mountain Chippewa Indians. The Rolla Beauty Shop, Vi's Beauty Shop, and Leo's Barber Shop are owned and operated by members of the tribe.

The famous International Peace Garden, on both sides of the boundary line between the United States and Canada, is situated in North Dakota and Manitoba. It is located 11 miles north of Dunseith, North Dakota, and about 8 miles northwest of the reservation. Access is by State Highway #3, a black top road running north through Dunseith, borders the International Peace Garden, and continues to the Canadian line where it merges into Manitoba Highway #10, also a black top road. In recent years more and more tourists have been attracted to this area through the efforts of civic minded citizens who have been instrumental in advertising and building up this International Peace Garden. The lodge is a large log building available for various organizations to hold meetings. The International get-together of the Masons of Canada and the United States is held there every summer, as well as the International High School Music Camp, and meetings of various other groups. Students from all over the United States and Canada attend the Music Camp every year. A large dormitory was built to house the students attending. There are numerous beautiful picnic spots and camp grounds in the area. The International Peace Garden is well-kept and maintained. Picnic areas are provided with fireplaces, tables, and benches for the convenience of the public.

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#### Federal Facilities and Services Available for Indians

The Bureau of Indian Affairs, Turtle Mountain Agency, has the responsibility for the Chippewa Indians of the Turtle Mountain Reservation.

There are approximately 180 Federal Government employees on the reservation, most of whom are in the Education and Health fields. There are Branch Chiefs in charge of Education, Welfare, Law and Order, Land Management, Roads, Employment Assistance, Land Operations, and Resources Development. The men in charge of the entire Turtle Mountain Agency are the Superintendent and the Administrative Manager. A medical Officer-in-charge is head of the Hospital and Public Health Services. The Bureau of Indian Affairs has an Area Office at Aberdeen, South Dakota, which serves the entire area of North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and parts of Minnesota.

Of the 180 employees under the jurisdiction of the Turtle Mountain Agency, most are Indian. All bus drivers, janitors, cooks, maintenance

helpers, mechanics, and Roads employees are Indian, as well as large percentage of the office staff, teachers and nurses and employees, at the hospital.

Health and hospital needs are provided through the U. S. Public Health Service. A 46-bed hospital, four doctors, two dentists, a pharmacist and adequate nursing staff serves the Turtle Mountain Reservation. Patients who need special care are sent to specialists in Minot, Fargo, and Jamestown. Tuberculosis patients are sometimes sent to the Sioux Sanitarium at Rapid City, South Dakota. However, most of the tuberculosis patients are contracted to the State of North Dakota. The North Dakota State Tuberculosis Sanitarium is located just west of the Turtle Mountain Reservation at San Haven, North Dakota. A modern 50-bed hospital is presently under construction and scheduled for completion in 1968.

Very fine educational facilities are provided for the children on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation. The system comprises five Federal schools, four of them located on the Turtle Mountain Reservation and one in Dunseith, North Dakota. The Turtle Mountain Community School has an enrollment of 974 as of December 1, 1966. This school consists of both elementary and high school. The high school enrollment is 266 and the elementary school is 708. Other schools are the Dunseith Indian School, three miles north of Dunseith, with an enrollment of 107; the Great Walker School, with an enrollment of 48; the Roussin School, with an enrollment of 46; and the Houle School, with an enrollment of 79. The last three named are all in the Belcourt area. All of these schools, with the exception of the Turtle Mountain Community School, are on the elementary level. Transportation is furnished with a fleet of 14 school buses. The high school is fully accredited by the State Department of Public Instruction. It consists of three departments: College preparatory, vocational and commercial. The vocational courses are not terminal. Those who teach in the Bureau of Indian Affairs schools must have at least a Bachelors Degree and many of the teachers on the staff have Masters Degrees. A division of Adult Education is maintained. Through this division much work is being carried on throughout the reservations. Many extension courses are presented through the Division of Supervised Study at North Dakota State University at Fargo.

An Elementary Parochial School, St. Ann's Mission, operated by the priests and sisters of St. Benedict is also located on the reservation and has a total enrollment of 325 Turtle Mountain Chippewa Indian children.

In addition to the above approximately 300 Indian students are enrolled in the Dunseith Public School, 115 in St. John Public School, 52 in Rolla Public School and 40 in Rolette Public School. All of these schools are on the perimeter of the reservation.

There are 140 elementary students enrolled at the Wahpeton off-reservation boarding school, 37 at the Flandreau Indian High School and 1 at the Pierre Boarding School.

There are 54 high school graduates enrolled in various colleges and 60 are taking some form of post-high school, vocational and technical training.

As good as the above sounds, it leaves much to be desired. The attendance problem is still the number one problem and remains at approximately 90% attendance. Every innovation that can be conceived of has been put into play to increase the attendance even to hiring a School Social Worker who goes from home to home seeking to impress upon the parents the importance of sending their children to school. Parental indifference is the chief source of poor attendance.

The BIA Employment Assistance Program is a voluntary program and the decision to relocate is made by the Indian. He is provided with realistic counseling and financial help when he decides to leave the reservation area and seek employment in metropolitan areas or nearby communities. This procedure is directed toward assisting the Indian worker to adjust to his new environment and to become a self-supporting member of his community.

The Adult Vocational Training Program, Public Law 959, is designed to benefit those Indians who are unemployed or underemployed because they lack a marketable skill. Major emphasis is placed on those in the age bracket from 18 to 35. Training courses will vary in length and none will exceed 24 months. There are over two hundred training courses available and the applicant's selection will depend on his qualifications for choice of training, sincerity, program funds, etc. The applicants under this program are assisted with pre-training counseling and guidance throughout their training. Financial assistance is provided as a grant, if needed, during the course of training. Upon completion of his training objective, the trainee is assisted in finding a job in his field of training. Occasionally the school, or the local State Employment Services will provide employment opportunities.

Other programs which offer excellent training opportunities through the State Employment Office at Rolla, North Dakota, are the Peace Corps Program, VISTA, The Job Corps, and the Manpower Development Act. A few Indian people are presently participating in these programs.

The Land Operations Branch serves the Turtle Mountain Reservation and is staffed with a Soil Conservationist, a Foreman-Fire Fighter. The branch provides advice and guidance on farming practices to owner-operators and prepares a comprehensive program of conservation on tribal and leased trust land. The Branch has provided the management for a large share of the Accelerated Public Works Projects and is engaged in land clearing, and planting of conifers, fruit trees, and berry bushes.

The Branch of Law and Order staff consists of a Criminal Investigator, Probation and Parole Officer, Captain of Police, Police Lieutenant, a Policewoman (clerk), four Policemen, three Trainee Policemen, one Chief Judge, three Associate Judges, One Court Stenographer, Jailer, Chief Cook and Assistant Cook. The Branch maintains Law and Order on the



reservation and adjacent areas of trust land where jurisdiction has not been accepted by the State; conducts investigations of major crimes; maintains working relationship with Federal agencies; State and Tribal officials; cooperates with prosecuting attorneys and investigative agencies; prepares and conducts training courses; and provides counseling and guidance to parolees. Present facilities and equipment include a Municipal Center containing a court-room, a jail with a capacity of 23 bunks, 1 security cell, 1 drunk tank offices for the Branch of Law and Order and Kitchen facilities for the feeding of prisoners; four radio equipped vehicles and two non-radio equipped cars.

The newly established Branch of Resources Development is staffed with a Resources Development Officer (Projects Development Officer) and Clerk-Stenographer. The Branch provides advice and assistance to the Superintendent; Tribal officials, organized tribal groups and individual Indians on social-economic development at the Turtle Mountain Agency. The Branch prepares overall economic development plans, in collaboration with the Tribal Council and agency staff members, works out plans for implementation and reporting procedure. Surveys of the Reservation's resources are made, and businesses and industries are contacted and made aware of reservation development opportunities. Financial backing and technical assistance is sought for businesses interested in sites on or near the reservations. Contacts are maintained with other Federal, State and local agencies in regard to economic development activity. In the absence of a Tribal Relations Branch at the reservation the Resources Development Officer advises and assists the Superintendent and tribal officials in drafting ordinances, codes, plans of operations, resolutions, constitutions and charters and in amending and perfecting tribal organic documents for achieving tribal business organizations.

Office of Economic Opportunity Programs presently being implemented on the Turtle Mountain Reservation and adjacent areas include the following:

1. Title I-B - Neighborhood Youth Corps - providing part-time employment and work experience for 135 needy students.

2. Title II-A - Community Action Programs consisting of the following components: Administration, Remedial Education, Youth Service Center, Consumer Education and Credit Union, Home Economics, Manual Arts (or Manpower Development Training), Guidance and Counseling, Study Hall and Library, Community Health Services, Legal Aid, Transportation, Special Education, Housing Aides, Head Start, Community Betterment (or Nelson Amendment).

Title III - Special Program to Combat Rural Poverty - administered by Farmers Home Administration to grant loans for home improvements, purchase of farm equipment, livestock, trucks, and to assist in the establishment of small businesses such as body shops, truck stops, cafes, barber shops, grocery stores, boat rental liveryes, etc.

4. Title V - Work Experience Program - administered by the Rolette County Welfare Board to provide work experience and training in trades such as welding, plumbing, electricity, carpentry, heavy equipment operation, mechanics, surveying, etc. Training is also offered for women in secretarial work, hospital work, etc.

An added benefit is received from the above programs from the many community services, beautification and development projects carried out as part of the training portion of the programs.

Sub-standard housing conditions are being partially alleviated by the implementation of Public Low-Rent Housing programs by the Turtle Mountain Housing Authority with the assistance of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. At the present time a 60 unit project is near completion and a 40 unit project is under construction and due for completion by July 1967. When complete these 100 units will provide modern housing for approximately 550 people. Construction of an additional 40 unit project is scheduled to begin in the summer of 1967.

The fulfillment of a long standing need for a community center building is expected to be realized in 1967 with the construction of a \$425,000 facility. The funds for this have been approved by the Economic Development Administration (Department of Commerce). The completed building will serve the community's need in many ways such as Tribal Offices, Community Action Program's educational activities, and many social events.

~~Plans are also being developed for construction of a motel in Belcourt which would also serve a great need for adequate accommodations for visitors to the community. This is to be constructed under the practical experience training component act (Department of Labor). The motel will initially consist of six units and living quarters for the operator. Additional units may be added later.~~